

Letter from Alexander Graham Bell to Gardiner Greene Hubbard and Gertrude M. Hubbard, August 24, 1875, with transcript

(Copy) 20 Salem, Mass. August 24th, 1875. Dear Mr. and Mrs. Hubbard:

Pardon me for again alluding to a subject that we had decided was to be put aside and hidden till next year.

When I first told you of the affection I had formed for Mabel I was afraid of you. I did not even dare to speak to Mrs. Hubbard — and so I wrote to her. When I was advised to conceal my feelings from Mabel for a year — I should have stated at once how hard it would be for me to do so without avoiding her — but I was afraid — and did not say one word.

Now this reticence and concealment has been the cause of all my troubles. This fear of showing what was in my heart has led me into many errors. Since I have come to know you better I feel full trust that I may tell you whatever is in my mind without your misunderstanding what I mean.

I must tell you then frankly, that — in regard to Mabel — I do not yet stand upon the footing that I desire.

My actions during the past two months have been as distasteful to me myself as they have been to you.

When I returned from Nantucket however, you were pleased to express yourselves as satisfied with my conduct. You said I had done well.

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Now I must confess to you that I am not satisfied with it myself. I feel myself still hampered by promises that I should not have made.

When I think of all that had happened during the past two months — I am humiliated beyond measure.

I have learned too bitter a lesson to be willing again to lower myself in my own estimation — and in the eyes of other people — even for her love .

But the same cause still exists that led me to act in the unmanly way which I now so much regret. I must be free to do whatever I think right and best — quite irrespective of your wishes — or those of other people.

20b Believe me I have the highest respect for your judgment. I feel affection for you both personally. But I fear I shall again become unmanned if I do not now assert the most absolute control over my own actions.

I will be bound by no promise — nor by the shadow of a promise .

It is understood by Mabel that I am not to approach this subject again until she is much older. It is understood by you that I am not to seek to know her mind for one year.

It is true that such are my intentions but I will not promise to abide by them. I must be free to judge for myself when the proper time has come to approach the subject again. I must be free to seek to know her mind when it seems just to me to do so.

I do not wish you to misunderstand me. I do not see what time has to do with the matter. When I am sure of her affection I wish to be engaged to her. — When I am in a position to offer her a home I wish to marry her, — whether it is in two years or two months! I wish to be free to do whatever seems best to me. If you can trust me to do what I think right and proper — I am sure you will never have cause to be ashamed of me.

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I have her interests at heart. I love her too well to allude to the subject so long as I believe it will pain her to have me do so. I respect her too much to seek to ascertain her mind before I think she knows me sufficiently to form a judgment.

I come to you then de novo .

I ask you for permission to visit her at your house with the understanding that I am bound by no promise whatever — and that all future arrangements in the matter shall be made between herself and me alone .

If you do not like my action conduct in the matter — or if you think it is 20c premature (for her sake) — you can deny me the house — and I can wait .

Believe me, dear Mr. and Mrs. Hubbard, Yours very respectfully, A. Graham Bell. Gardiner G. Hubbard, Esq., Brattle St., Cambridge.